

THE Baptist Record

JOURNAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CONVENTION SINCE 1877

BRIEFS

SBTS TRUSTEES ELECT FIRST BLACK OFFICER

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP) — Citing the election of Southern Seminary's first African American board officer as "another necessary step in the history of the Southern Baptist Convention," seminary president H. Albert Mohler Jr. welcomed Dallas businessman Alan "Keith" Daniels, a member of MacArthur Boulevard Church in Irving, Texas, to his new post as board secretary after a unanimous trustee vote. Mohler said Daniels' election is an indication that the Lord is "helping this denomination every day look more like America and more like the world around us."

DOCUMENTARY TESTS GOSPEL MANUSCRIPTS

DENVER (BP) — Detailed examination of the earliest New Testament manuscripts in the upcoming documentary, *Fragments of Truth*, proves the reliability and viability of the Gospels, evangelical scholar and lead film commentator Craig Evans told *Baptist Press*. Showing April 24 in 750 theaters for one night only, *Fragments of Truth* shows viewers the earliest New Testament manuscripts and offers insight from 20 top scholars encompassing several specialties, including conservationists and curators from museums, libraries and faculties from around the world. Additional information is available at tinyurl.com/frgmentsdoc.

GATEWAY TO OFFER BREA CAMPUS SALE

Trustees for Gateway Seminary in suburban Los Angeles have approved a plan to sell the seminary's former regional campus in Brea, Ca., with the proceeds being added to the seminary's endowment. The two-acre property, located approximately 25 miles from the main campus in the Los Angeles suburb of Ontario, had been the seminary's location in Southern California since 1986. Academic operations in Brea will end by July 31, with classes transitioning to the campus in Ontario. The move is the final step in the seminary's transition that began in 2014.



SEARCH SET — Members of the presidential search committee for the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville get down to business after the special called trustee meeting April 17 to begin the process of replacing Frank S. Page, who resigned March 27 after admitting to a "personal failing." Members of the search committee include (from left) Steve Rummage, Adron Robinson, Rolland Slade, Steve Swofford, Joe Knott, and Carol Yarber. (BP photo).

Exec. Comm. elects search team

NASHVILLE (BP and local reports) — The presidential search committee is in place to find the next president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee in Nashville, after Frank S. Page resigned March 27 because of what he termed a "personal failing."

The search committee was elected April 17 by Executive Committee trustees in a special called meeting in Nashville. Trustees nominated 18 people from within their ranks. Members of the search committee who were elected by their fellow trustees are:

■ Steve Swofford, search committee chairman and head pastor of First Church in Rockwall, Texas.

■ Carol Yarber, search committee secretary and retired medical administrator from Athens, Texas.

see TEAM on p. 9

Nat'l Day of Prayer to be held on May 3

WASHINGTON (BP) — The 2018 National Day of Prayer, scheduled for May 3, will mobilize people across the nation in public prayer events and be capped with a nationally televised and livestreamed prayer service at 6:30 p.m. (Central Time) from the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.

Ronnie Floyd, two-term president of the Southern Baptist Convention and senior pastor of multi-campus Cross Church in northwest Arkansas, is serving as president of the event.

"America needs God now, more than any time in our generation," Floyd said. "America is broken. Division is undeniable and unity is missing. Racial tension is alarming. Lawlessness abounds. Reconciliation appears impossible. Government cannot fix us. Politics will not heal us."

Pray for America — Unity, is the 2018 theme, based on Ephesians 4:3, with event participants encouraged to address statewide, regional, and national concerns, Floyd reported in one of several videos at nationaldayofprayer.org.

see PRAYER on p. 9

Time running out for MBC noms

JACKSON, MS (Special) — The 2018 Committee on Nominations approved by the messengers of the 182nd Mississippi Baptist Convention in October of last year will soon begin reviewing trustee/board member positions on the boards and commissions of the Mississippi Baptist Convention (MBC) to serve in 2019.

Robby Rikard, committee chairman and pastor of First Church, Wiggins, has said there are a limited number of vacancies to be filled on the following boards and commissions:

- Baptist Children's Village
- Baptist Memorial Health Care System, Inc. (Memphis)
- Board of Ministerial Education
- Education Commission

- Historical Commission
- Blue Mountain College
- Mississippi College
- William Carey University
- Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission, Inc.
- Mississippi Baptist Convention Board
- Mississippi Baptist Foundation

The Committee on Nominations will work with the heads of the institutions and agencies to bring a list of nominees to be approved by the messengers of the 183rd annual meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Convention on October 30-31, 2018, at First Church, Jackson.

For nomination forms, telephone Executive Administration (601) 292-3201 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 201. A nomination form can



also be downloaded by visiting tinyurl.com/99nom and scrolling to the bottom of the page.

Completed forms should be mailed to the Committee on Nominations, c/o Dr. Jim Futral, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530, at the above address to be received no later than May 1.

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From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

Marriage as Obsolete

On a warm, windswept Saturday, a young bride and groom are married in a Mississippi Baptist church. It is a scene undoubtedly repeated many times on that Saturday in many other venues around the state and country, but we seem to never grow tired of this age-old celebration of unfailing love and lifetime commitment.

Within minutes, the bride and groom are no longer two individuals but one entity in the eyes of God and heading into a lifetime of love and devotion. The challenges of marriage and the tragedies of life will have to be faced in the future, but for now all of that can be put aside for this brief, shining moment when God is on His throne and everything is right with the world.

The wedding ceremony is important to us, because it is symbolic of how deeply we yearn for our country and our world to take seriously the concept of traditional marriage. That's the real reason we travel great distances and go to great expense to be a part of such weddings.

There are people in the America of today, however, who would degrade the God-ordained marital union of one man and one woman for life. There are those who would have us believe that marriage is not special or God-ordained at all, but rather a common "commitment" or "union" between people of whatever genders and sexual preferences suit them at the moment.

There are political, judicial, and cultural leaders in America who shamelessly excuse such sinful and immoral behavior and even boast of their efforts to normalize perverse relationships (Romans 1:32). Commentators have begun to observe that future generations of Americans will likely have a completely different concept of marriage than we do today.

In the world of tomorrow, marriage will mean anything anyone wants it to mean. Homosexual and lesbian marriage will have the same status as heterosexual marriage, but so will marriages between multiple partners, simultaneous marriages, group marriages, open marriages, and marriages between adults and legally-consenting young children.

There may even be legally-recognized marriages between humans and animals. (Don't laugh. Who

would have thought we would have gone as far as we have?)

This is merely one skirmish among many in the struggle with secularists and elitists who would destroy foundational institutions like marriage and the way of life that goes with those institutions, simply so they can live as they please.

Decades of indoctrination and intimidation seem to be paying off. A poll last year by the reputable Gallup organization found 64% of respondents supported same sex marriage — a stark turnaround from a 1996 Gallup poll that found 68% of respondents opposed marriages between two men or two women.

A 2014 Gallup poll along the same lines led researchers at that company to reach these conclusions:

■ For proponents of marriage equality, years of playing offense have finally paid off as this movement has reached a tipping point in recent years — both legally and in the court of public opinion.

■ An important region on the radar of gay marriage advocates is the South... the only region where same sex marriage support falls below the 50% mark.

■ Public opinion in southern states will be a barometer to observe, as the bulk of future legal battles will play out there in the months and years to come.

That last point would explain the multimedia onslaught across Mississippi by the Human Rights Campaign, designed to convince Mississippians of the humanity of same sex relationships.

Mississippi Baptists and Christians in general have to get involved for our voices to be heard on this matter. Otherwise, we will be relegated to the fringes as we have been on so many other important issues of our day. As the Gallup researchers point out, the landmark battles of the future will be in the South.

First, let us get our own marriages in order. It is embarrassing and shameful that the divorce rate among believers is just as high as it is for non-believers. Only if we practice what we preach when it comes to marriage will people start to pay attention to us.

The struggle for the biblical concept of marriage is worth the effort. May we not fail at this crucial task.

To arm, or not to arm

There are simply too many targets for police to be able to guard everyone. And even when they are in the right place at the right time, an officer's uniform is like a neon sign saying, "Shoot me first."

It's also not realistic to keep terrorists and criminals from getting weapons. The war on guns has been as much of a failure as the war on drugs. Terrorists can also resort to homemade bombs, and have lately made a habit of using vehicles as weapons.

What happens when background checks on gun purchases inevitably fail to stop these killers from attacking? What is the backup plan?

Shortly after the attack at the Sutherland Springs church on November 5, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton warned: "This is going to happen again, and so we need people in churches — either professional security, or at least arming some of the parishioners or the congregation — so that they can respond if something like this... when something like this happens again."

Permit holders have stopped dozens of would-be mass public shootings in malls, churches, schools, universities, and town centers. Gun control advocates perennially fear that a permit holder will accidentally shoot a bystander, or that a police officer will accidentally harm a permit holder. But this has never happened in a mass public shooting.

Permit holders are also incredibly law-abiding. Americans as a whole commit crimes 37 times more frequently than do police officers, but police themselves commit crimes at seven times the rate of permit holders in Florida and Texas.

The heroic actions of Stephen Willeford on November 5 are a testament to the power of a good guy with a gun. He saved many lives at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas. The killer, Devin Kelley, was circling back to shoot the wounded when Willeford showed up with a rifle. Willeford's fast actions stopped Kelley's attack, saving the lives of the twenty wounded and possibly many more.

But Willeford isn't alone. Permit holders have stopped some other church attacks over the last decade. For example:



Guest opinion
with John R. Lott Jr.

■ Antioch, TN, September 24, 2017: A shooter, Emanuel Kidega Samson, killed one and injured seven others. But the attack could have been much worse. An usher, Robert Engle, first tried unsuccessfully to wrestle Samson, a very large bodybuilder. But Samson was slightly injured in the skirmish, giving Engle a chance to retrieve his permitted concealed handgun from his car. Engle went back into the church and managed to hold the attacker at gunpoint until police arrived.

■ Aurora, CO, April 24, 2012: Kiaron Parker crashed into a car in a church parking lot, before exiting his vehicle and opening fire. Parker was only able to kill one person before being shot dead by a parishioner who was an off-duty police officer.

■ Spartanburg, SC, March 25, 2012: Jesse Gates kicked open a church door and pointed a shotgun at the pastor and his congregation. Parishioner Aaron Guyton, a concealed weapons permit holder, got the drop on Gates and held him at gunpoint. Sheriff Chuck Wright called Aaron and others at the church, "everyday heroes."

■ Colorado Springs, CO, December 2007: Matthew Murray killed two people in the Colorado Springs New Life Church parking lot before being shot by church member Jeanne Assam. A wounded Murray then committed suicide. The church was a mega church with over 10,000 members, and Murray had over a thousand rounds of ammunition. Assam had gotten a concealed handgun permit to protect herself from an ex, and was a

see LOTT on p. 8

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Friend: Emergency landing pilot models Bible femininity

BOERNE, Texas (BP) — When members of First Church in Boerne, Texas, heard recordings of radio transmissions from a Southwest Airlines pilot who made a harrowing emergency landing last week in Philadelphia, they recognized the voice.

Tammie Jo Shults, the pilot who guided Flight 1380 to the ground April 17 after a midflight engine failure shot debris through a window and killed one passenger, is a recognizable figure at the Texas Hill Country church, which averages 900 in worship.

She has led the children's worship program and taught Sunday School for children, middle schoolers, high schoolers, and adults, said Staci Thompson, a longtime friend and administrative assistant in the church office.

"When we heard the voice, it was just like talking on the phone. That's what she sounds like," Thompson told Baptist Press.

The church was impressed but not shocked, Thompson said, at reports Shults, 56, landed the plane safely after a 20,000-foot drop in six minutes, then walked down the aisle hugging passengers.

The plane was bound from New York to Dallas. Seven of the 144 passengers aboard were injured in addition to the one fatality.

Social media reports by surviving passengers hailed Shults as having "nerves of steel" and being "a true American hero." One passenger told The Dallas Morning News, "I specifically said to her, 'Do I get a hug too?' She said, 'Of course, I wouldn't let you by without a hug.'"

Shults' biggest goal amid the emergency landing and subsequent media coverage, Thompson said, "is that she can share her faith and it resonate and



ON THE GROUND — A Southwest Airlines Boeing 737 dropped 20,000 feet in about six minutes before making an emergency landing in Philadelphia, Pa., on April 17 after one of the jet's two engines exploded in mid-air. (BP screen capture from CBS News)

awaken people's eyes to how great a God we have."

Mike Mantooth, executive pastor of ministries and missions at First Church, told Baptist Press via email, "I'm always amazed at the caliber of people at FBC Boerne. Tammie Jo is an example of one of them. Through her commitment to excellence in aviation, she has gained a national platform to give witness to her faith in Christ."

"We are proud of her as her church family. She is being hailed as a national hero, and we are celebrating what God has done through her and at the same time praying for her as she grieves the loss of a passenger."

Shults and Flight 1380 first officer Darren Ellisor are not granting news media interviews but did release a statement the day after the emergency saying they were "simply doing our job."

"Our hearts are heavy," they stated, according to USA Today. "On behalf of the entire crew, we appreciate the outpouring of support from the public and our



Shults during her days as a U.S. Navy fighter pilot.

coworkers as we all reflect on one family's profound loss.

"We joined our company today in focused work and interviews with investigators. We are not conducting media interviews."

Thompson said Shults long has evidenced a heart for evangelism and ministries of compas-

sion. She has provided housing for hurricane victims and widows; helps care for her disabled younger sister and her husband's elderly mother; and shares her faith in Christ with co-captains on Southwest flights.

"I hear stories about hard times that different co-cap-

tains have been going through, and how she just gets to pray over them and give them Scripture and give them love," Thompson said.

Multiple news media reports have cited a blog post in which Shults stated being a pilot gave her "the opportunity to witness for Christ on almost every flight."

In a feature article on Shults, The Dallas Morning News seemed almost bewildered by her Christian testimony.

"It seems that nearly everyone in Boerne has a Tammie Jo story," the newspaper stated, "and taken together, they paint a picture of a woman almost too impossibly caring, too impossibly devoted to her community."

This week's emergency landing is not the first time Shults has made news. Three decades ago, she became one of the first female fighter pilots in the U.S. military, piloting F/A-18 Hornet fighter jets in the Navy, The New York Times reported.

Thompson said even amid success in a male-dominated profession, Shults has remained committed to living out biblical gender roles in the home and church and to teaching fellow female pilots how to model biblical femininity.

"She even created a business that does girl pilot stuff to empower other women to be able to be feminine and be who they are in the workplace," Thompson said.

As news media reports proliferate about Shults' heroism, Thompson said, "she wants people to know that God was there with her" on Flight 1380, "that He helped her in getting control of that plane and landing that plane."

"It was because of Him, not her," Thompson said. "She was just a teammate and a co-captain. He was the captain."

Shults and her husband Dean, also a Southwest pilot, have two children, ages 18 and 20.



SQUIRES

So. Baptist chaplain fights Army over complaint

WASHINGTON (BP) — Southern Baptist chaplain Jerry Scott Squires is fighting a U.S. Army investigator's charge of unlawful discrimination for refusing to preside over a marriage retreat that included same sex couples.

However, First Liberty Institute in Plano, Texas, which is representing Squires in legal matters surrounding his case, said in an April 17 letter to the Army that Squires followed federal law as well as Army and Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) chaplaincy protocol when he rescheduled a Feb. 9 Strong Bonds marriage retreat in order to involve a non-SBC chaplain,

thereby accommodating the attendance of a lesbian couple.

"Federal law and Army policy both make clear that chaplains must remain faithful to the tenets of their faith," First Liberty attorney Michael Berry wrote in the letter. "The failure of a chaplain to do so exposes the chaplain to risk of losing their ecclesiastical endorsement, or worse, violates... federal law and policy... Squires' actions here are fully protected by federal law and regulation."

Berry is First Liberty's deputy general counsel and director of military affairs.

Squires, who follows the 2000 Baptist Faith and Mes-

sage in protocol established by the North American Mission Board as an SBC-endorsed chaplain, told First Liberty he was shocked when an Army investigator concluded he should face the disciplinary action that is currently pending.

"I hope the Army sees that I was simply following Army regulations and the tenets of my church," said Squires, a decorated major with more than 25 years of military service, in a First Liberty press release April 17.

NAMB executive director of chaplaincy Doug Carver, a former Army chief of chaplains, defended Squires in an April 18

statement to Baptist Press.

"The relationship between endorsed military chaplains and their ecclesiastical authority is sacrosanct and protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution," Carver said. "In a technical sense, military chaplains are 'on loan' to the Armed Forces from their respective faith groups who, in turn, expect the military to be faithful stewards of our pastors in uniform."

Squires has "our full support and prayers as he remains faithful to his Lord, his tenets of faith, and his commitment to serve all soldiers under his care," Carver said.

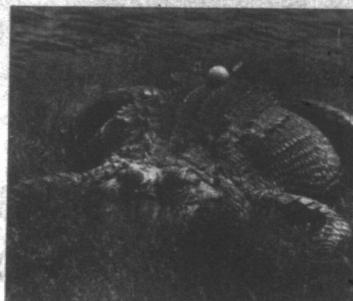
Recently I wrote a Directions article on "Play the Ball Where the Monkey Throws It." The story came from a friend who went to a golf course in Africa near the jungle's edge. The owners of the golf course had an unending problem with the monkeys that would come out on the course and grab the golf balls and play with them and often throw them. Not being able to control the monkeys, the owners of the golf course put up signs instructing the golfers, "Play the ball where the monkey throws it."

In the article, I dealt with the fact that life is a lot like that with all the shifts and changes and interruptions of life. In light of that article, a friend brought me this picture and asked what to do now. I said, "I'm not going to play the ball, and sometimes you need to leave the ball alone." The truth is that in all areas of life there are occasions when you just need to leave the ball alone. The wisdom of Solomon flows through and is reflected concerning these matters in Proverbs.

In Proverbs 26:17 Solomon said, "He who passes by and meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a dog by the ears." What a graphic and beautiful picture of people getting involved where they shouldn't and possibly making things worse. If you don't quite understand Proverbs 26:17, the wise man of the Old Testament was basically saying keep your nose out of other folks' business. Sometimes you just can't help people and there are some people who just can't help themselves to stay out of other folks' lives. They feel passionate about giving their advice and straightening other people out.



Sometimes Just Leave the Ball Alone



I get it, but there are times, places, and events when you really want to help and you feel like you need to intervene, and maybe the intervention is required but at the same time, on the other hand, you are going to intrude

into some things that you ought to leave alone. Now, if you do feel that you have got to take some action and you need to intervene, here are some things to keep in mind that might be helpful and may even prove to be productive.

If you've got to intervene, approach it with a sense of kindness and genuine caring. Through the years, I've had people to say to me, "Can I be brutally honest with you?" I confess, when they would ask me that, I would as a rule say, "Absolutely." Bring it on. Only to find out that some folks place a lot more emphasis on the brutally than they do the honest part. I have learned that sometimes I don't appreciate people being brutally honest.

I've never had anybody say to me, "Can I lovingly or kindly be honest with you about something?" I can re-

member dozens of people and even call them by name who loved to get hold of the brutal handle of life and use it on my head or heart. It's probably rarely a good idea for anybody to approach another about any matter with a tong in one hand and a sword in the other. But somebody who really cares, someone with a loving spirit, someone who actually wants to be redemptive in a situation, can find, if not an open door at least a crack in the door, that might be helpful.

As you go through life and all the strange quirks and shifts and monkeys running around over the course of your life, messing up the game as you see it, you can't always just go along trying to adjust to that and play the ball anyway. This picture that's been included is worth ten thousand of my words. I don't know how the ball got on the alligator's back, but regardless of how it got there, I'd be prayerful and careful about approaching the ball or the alligator with a golf club in my hand.

As Solomon would steer us away from meddling in other folks' quarrels, I might add don't go along and pick up a dog by its ears. Sometimes it is just best to leave the ball alone. Space won't allow me to do this, but I can think of multiple incidences when in a marriage relationship, if a man or woman had just been sensible enough to leave stuff alone, life would have been a lot better. It's true at work. It's true at church. It's true in your social relations. There is an endless stream of places and faces where the golf ball of life may land that it might be best just to leave the ball alone.

The author can be contacted at directions@mbcb.org.

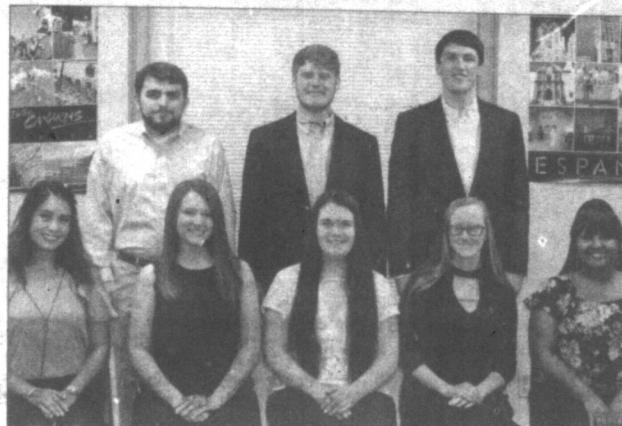
College News



The **BLUE MOUNTAIN COLLEGE** ETA Mississippi Chapter of Alpha Chi national honor society recently installed its newest members. Alpha Chi admits students from all academic disciplines and membership is limited to the top 10 percent of an institution's juniors, seniors, and graduate students. New inductees include (front row, l to r) Rebecca Grace Spencer, a double major in biology and music education from Corinth; Lydia Grace Robinson, an elementary education (K-6) major from Collierville, Tenn.; Tayler Renee Carlisle, a psychology major from Sarah; Tracey Lynn McDaniel, an elementary education (K-6) major from Olive Branch; (second row, l to r) Sarah Faith Hill, an exercise science major from Pontotoc; Lauren Ashley Collins, an exercise science major from Cleveland; Megan Lee Garrison, a business administration major from Myrtle; Alison Kittrah Hale, a business administration major from New Albany; Taylor O-Lynn Collins, an exercise science major from Cleveland; (back row, l to right) Mallorie Kristin Sweat, an exercise science major from Selmer, Tenn. and Jacob Franklin Riley, a double major in Biblical Studies and English from Hernando.



Wes Dykes has been named the dean of the Winters School of Music and Ministry Studies at **WILLIAM CAREY UNIVERSITY**. Dykes joined the Carey faculty in March 2012 as coordinator of the instrumental program, which includes several major performing groups and ensembles. He was successful in growing the program from 18 to 140 students in three years. He directs the Symphonic Winds and the Spirit of Carey, a high-energy indoor winds and percussion group. Dykes is originally from Pensacola, Florida. He holds a bachelor's degree in music education from the University of Southern Mississippi, a master's degree in music education/conducting from the University of South Carolina, and a Doctor of Musical Arts in conducting from the University of Southern Mississippi.



BLUE MOUNTAIN COLLEGE students were recently inducted into the Sigma Beta Delta honor society that encourages and recognizes scholarship and accomplishments among students of business, management, and administration. New members include (seated, l to r) Michelle Calderon (Lima, Peru), Whitney Brooke Bowens (Booneville), Megan Lee Garrison (Myrtle), Allison Kitturah Hale, and Stephanie Raquel Wilson (Tupelo); (standing, l to r) Samuel Joseph Marino (Corinth), Edward Britt Bender Jr. (Olive Branch), and Logan Michael McBryer (Baldwyn).

BIBLIOCRYPTER

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Clue: V = U

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Romans 8:10

By Charles Marx, 1932-2004, © 2005

75 FOUNDATION FLASHBACK

Highlights from the history of your Mississippi Baptist Foundation shared in the format of their original publication in *The Baptist Record*.

The following photo and writeup were published in *The Baptist Record* on April 13, 1989.



Fund to develop small church ministries

Ed Townsend, second from left, presents a check to Jimmy McCaleb for the "Jimmy McCaleb Church Music Ministries, Inc." The check, with others given for this purpose, will be deposited with the Mississippi Baptist Foundation and the income will be used to help develop ministries in small churches served by bivocational ministers of music or volunteer leaders. Sarah Townsend is at left; Aubrey Boone, executive secretary of the Foundation, right. Any gift given through the Foundation is tax deductible.

>>> Visit msbaptistfoundation.org, call 601-292-3210, or e-mail foundation@mbcb.org to learn how the Mississippi Baptist Foundation can serve you, your family, and your church.



WELCOME TO WASHINGTON — U.S. Vice President Mike Pence (right foreground) greets Ronnie Floyd (left foreground), senior pastor of multi-campus Cross Church in northwest Arkansas, in Washington, D.C., on April 11 during the Mega Metro Conference, an annual gathering for pastors of larger Southern Baptist churches. (BP photo)

Vice President Pence meets with Southern Baptist pastors

WASHINGTON (BP) — U.S. Vice President Mike Pence met April 11 in Washington, D.C. with participants in the Mega Metro Conference, an annual gathering for pastors of Southern Baptist churches with average worship attendance of at least 3,000 or average Sunday School attendance of at least 2,000.

Ronnie Floyd, senior pastor of multi-campus Cross Church in northwest Arkansas, current president of the National Day of Prayer Task Force, and host of this year's Mega Metro Conference, said Pence gathered with the pastors during one portion of a 90-minute briefing with White House senior staff at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building.

"I thought if the vice president spent five minutes with us it would be outstanding," Floyd told Baptist Press in written comments. "In reality, he spent about 20 minutes with us, speaking to us and affirming the administration's great commitment to... the sanctity and dignity of human life as well as the great commitment of advancing religious liberty in America and across the world."

"He also assured the group that the president and the entire administration needed the prayers of people and the churches across America," said Floyd, former two-term president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"Our pastors and wives absolutely loved hearing from the vice president and so appreciate his personal commitment to Christ," Floyd added.

Pence tweeted a photo of his meeting with the pastors and

wrote, "So good to see Pastor @ RonnieFloyd and faith leaders in town for the 2018 Mega Metro Conference. [U.S. President Donald Trump] and I are grateful for the prayers, support, and ministries of all these great men and women of faith. God bless them all!"

The previous evening, conference attendees met with and prayed over Sam Brownback, a Republican former U.S. senator and former Nebraska governor now serving as the Trump administration's ambassador at large for international religious freedom.

On Sunday, Floyd told Cross Church about both meetings and led in prayer "for our nation... especially in relationship to the matters in Syria," he said, "but as always, I called upon our people to pray for America and our leaders."

At First Church in Hendersonville, Tenn., pastor Bruce Chesser told about the meeting with Pence and passed along the vice president's thanks for Americans' prayer support. Then Chesser led the church to pray for government officials at all levels of American life.

"I pray regularly for our leaders in worship so that was not unusual," Chesser told BP via email.

However, Chesser reported, Pence "specifically asked us to thank our people for their prayers and ask them to continue."

Chesser said he was "impressed" with Pence's "sincerity and his humility."

"I knew he was a person of faith," Chesser said, but following the meeting, "I realized the

depth of his faith more fully. He had a good sense of humor and a winsome spirit about him. It was a great experience."

Pastor Brandon Park of Kansas City, Mo.-area Connection Point Church also reported the meeting to the congregation he leads, which prays regularly for government leaders.

Park told BP he was struck by "the sheer number of born-again, evangelical Christians that are working for" the Trump administration as well as the access they grant to evangelical leaders.

Pence, Park recounted, said "there's more about this country that unites us than that divides us, and we need to come together and focus more on what unites us as a nation." Park viewed that comment as "a help [to] bridge some of the political divide that's out there."

Pastor Brian Stowe of First Church in Plant City, Fla., said attendees in both the congregation's Sunday-morning worship services applauded when he reported on the meeting with Pence.

"I talked about his being unashamed of his Christian faith," Stowe told BP, and about his expression of thanks for prayer support.

The gathering with Pence reminded Stowe "of the influence we can have as we lead our churches, as we lead our communities to have a stand that's morally right," he said.

The Mega Metro Conference, which meets in a different city each year focused on local church ministry, the pastorate, prayer, and leadership, according to a news release from Floyd.

2018 State Speakers Tournament

The 2018 State Speakers Tournament was held at Brandon Church, Brandon, on April 14.



► OPEN DIVISION SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS, from left, are Chelsie Warner, 1st place, Cleary Church, Clinton; Michael Belcher, 2nd place, Calvary Church, Meridian; and Tyler Smith, 3rd place, Northcrest Church, Meridian.



► BAPTIST COLLEGE DIVISION SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS, from left, are Sarah Beth Tidwell, 4th place, Yellow Leaf Church, Water Valley; Hannah Cooper, 3rd place, Northcrest Church, Meridian; Ishmon Foster, 2nd place, Hillcrest Church, New Albany; and Maeci McCullough, 1st place, First Church, Coffeeville.

Just for the Record



LILLY ORCHARD CHURCH, MOSS POINT, recently baptized (from left) Lynn Ward, Rodney Willis, Sara Gautier, Larry Dize, and Donna Dize. Ricky Colvin, pastor.



TUCKERS CROSSING CHURCH, LAUREL, celebrated Palm Sunday by dressing in Bible-based costumes. Marshall and Karen Fitzgerald, Children in Action leaders. Eddie Bryant, pastor.



SEMINARY CHURCH, SEMINARY, recently held groundbreaking for their new, 12,000-square-feet worship facility. Tim Hubbard, pastor.



NEW HOPE CHURCH, GULFPORT, held a fundraiser for their Cuban mission trip in November, 2018.

In other Church News:

► Shiloh Church, Mantachie, is ordaining Blake Buchanan to the gospel ministry Apr. 29.



PHALTI AND PLEASANT GROVE CHURCHES, CLARKE ASSOCIATION, recently honored Grady and Martha Crowell upon his retirement as director of missions for Clarke Association in Quitman. The Crowells were presented with bird houses built as models of the two churches honoring them, along with letters of appreciation. Grady Crowell brought the morning message, followed by a luncheon.



Pearl River Association, McNeil, welcomed JOURNEY FELLOWSHIP into the association at the spring meeting on April 5. Pictured are missions director Carol Myers and Journey Fellowship members Willie McDaniel, Sandy McDaniel, and Janie Richard.

Bible Drills



HARMONY CHURCH, LOUISVILLE, recently recognized the church's 2018 Children and Student Bible drillers.



CENTER CHURCH, BLUE SPRINGS, recognizes Sarah Beth Black, student driller; Lessie Joe Black, children's driller; and Katie Wallace, student driller.



BECKER CHURCH, MONROE ASSOCIATION, recognizes its Bible drillers.



CENTER CHURCH, ATTALA COUNTY, recognizes their Bible Buddies, Children, and Youth Bible drillers.



HIGH HILL CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA, recently recognized the church's 2018 Bible drillers (from left) Walker Wolverton, Neely Wolverton, Alexis Billings, and Ryleigh Wolverton.

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Half the man: Kentucky pastor drops 240 lbs.

GLASGOW, Ky. (BP and local reports) — There's a good reason for the spring in Jeremy Atwood's step. The Glasgow, Ky., pastor has lost 240 pounds over the past two years on a quest to restore his physical and spiritual health.

For Atwood, food had become a vice that was sapping his energy and hindering his ministry. Years of unchecked eating had brought him to the brink of 500 pounds.

"I was a fast food junkie, I mean, I was truly addicted," he recalled.

Atwood, 37, senior pastor of Immanuel Church in Glasgow, Ky., isn't alone in his struggle with food. Studies have shown that one of every three Kentuckians is considered obese — and pastors are especially prone.

That's why Atwood, along with an army of others who are fighting through weight issues, have begun sounding the warning about one of the chief occupational hazards of their jobs: overeating.

Facing schedules heavy on weekday luncheons, Sunday afternoon dinners, and endless potluck meals, it's easy for pastors to add inches to the waistband. Studies show that more than 75% of American preachers are overweight, many to the point of obesity.

Seymour Wattenbarger, director of missions for the Knox Association of Baptists in southeastern Kentucky, said pastors often joke about their food consumption, but it's no laughing matter. Wattenbarger knows. He dropped 75 pounds three years ago in a

push to restore his health after suffering a stroke.

"Our pastors are digging their graves with their teeth," he said.

It would be the words of a five-year-old boy in the Great Smokey Mountains that shook Atwood to his senses, putting him on a path to wholeness. With all the eye-catching sites in the most-visited tourist area in the nation, the child was astonished by Atwood's girth. With a look of amazement, the child called for his mother to look, too.

"I can still see the little boy in my mind," Atwood said. "He wasn't being mean, and he wasn't being malicious. We all know small children can be brutally honest. They don't have a filter, and they don't have a volume control. It really stung that this little boy considered me a freak."

After returning home, Atwood and his wife Cara went out to eat with Curtis Woods, associate executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, at Rough River State Resort Park where they took full advantage of the restaurant's buffet line.

Both men felt guilty about their gluttony that day and challenged each other to do better.

That brought Atwood to a date he remembers well: Dec. 28, 2015. That's the day he went to the doctor to seek help. That's also the day he stepped on a scale for the first time in about two years because he preferred not knowing how much he weighed.

"God had really been convicting me, bringing me to the point of complete bro-

kenness," he recalled. "I felt awful. I looked awful. I knew I had to do something about it, so I made an appointment with a doctor to discuss bariatric surgery."

From the waiting room the day of the surgery, Atwood heard the nurse call his name. He walked back to the examination area. The first stop was the scale. She asked him to step on. The dial read 491 pounds.

"I was shocked," he said. "I knew I was out of control, but I didn't know it was that bad. Had that nurse not been standing there, I probably would have burst into tears."

Atwood, a lineman on his high school football team, had always struggled with his weight. He tipped the scale at 250 pounds when he graduated college. He slowly gained year by year after that.

Yo-yo dieting didn't help. He said it wasn't uncommon for him to lose 30 pounds and gain back 40. One year, he put on 70 pounds.

"I had lost my prophetic voice," Atwood said. "How are you going to speak to someone about their sin when you weigh 491 pounds? I knew I had to do whatever it took to lose that weight, to be obedient to Christ."

After having a gastric sleeve procedure in April of 2016, Atwood nowadays runs and lifts weights to help keep the weight off. He has competed in his first 5K race (3.1 miles) and is looking forward to a half-marathon (13.2 miles). He also plans to skydive.

"For too long, I just existed," he said. "I want to live life to the fullest."



ATWOOD

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LOTT

cont. from p.2

volunteer security guard at the church.

Normally, churches are easy targets. Some killers have even picked churches for precisely this reason:

■ Charleston, S.C., June 17, 2015: Dylann Roof originally targeted Charleston College, but friend Christon Scriven has suggested that Roof switched targets because of worries that armed security would stop him. "I don't think the church was his primary target, because he told us he was going for the school," Scriven said. "But I think he couldn't get into the school because of the security ... so I think he just settled for the church."

■ Detroit, Mi., February 2016: The FBI fortunately foiled plans for a mass public shooting

at one of the largest churches in the Detroit area. The FBI tapped the individual's phone calls and heard the chilling words: "It's easy, and a lot of people go there. Plus people are not allowed to carry guns in church. Plus it would make the news."

Over 98% of all mass public shootings since 1950 have taken place in areas where general citizens are prohibited from carrying firearms. We can't just keep ignoring the fact that killers pick targets where people can't defend themselves.

But these attacks become massacres when there's no one to fight back.

Lott is president of the Crime Prevention Research Center in Alexandria, Va., and most recently the author of *The War on Guns*. A frequent interviewee in newspapers and on radio and television, he holds a doctorate in economics from the University of California at Los Angeles. Edited for style.

Revivals & Homecomings

► Escatawpa Church, Escatawpa: Revival, Apr. 29 - May 2; Sun., 10:50 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon. - Wed., 11 a.m., lunch, with services 11:25 a.m. and 6:30 p.m.; James E. Messer, Ted Taylor, Greg Pouncey, and Jim Futral, speakers; Phil Willis, worship leader; "Airhead" Robbins, children's revival worship leader.

► Harmony Church, Brookhaven: Revival, May 3 - 6; Thurs. - Sat., 7 p.m.; Sun., 11 a.m.; Benji Pyeatt, speaker; Harvey Magee, worship leader.

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TEAM

cont. from p. 1

■ Joe Knott, an attorney from Raleigh, N.C.

■ Adron Robinson, lead pastor of Hillcrest Church in Country Club Hills, Ill.

■ Steve Rummage, current chairman of the Executive Committee and senior pastor of Bell Shoals Church in Brandon, Fla.

■ Rolland Slade, senior pastor of Meridian Church in El Cajon, Ca.

The search committee "may elect a vice chairman at a later meeting," Swofford said in a statement released to Baptist Press.

Swofford also said in the statement that the search committee will be releasing an e-mail address in the next few weeks, through which the committee will receive recommendations. "In the meantime, we will be gathering information and putting together a profile of what we feel like we are looking for," he said.

The search committee will be joined in an ex officio capacity by the next Executive Committee chair when he or she is elected in June, as stipulated by Executive Committee bylaws. The new chair will be

a voting member of the search committee.

Rummage was formally elected to the search committee by trustees and therefore is not serving in an ex officio capacity. He will continue on the search committee when his term as Executive Committee chairman ends.

"I'm excited about the committee that was elected, and I commend the Executive Committee for their choices," Swofford said. "As has already been reported, the committee is marked by racial and gender diversity as well as a mixture of clergy and laypeople."

"I also think it is worth noting that they are from all over our convention — from Florida to California, and from Texas to Illinois. Add to that the varied ages and background experiences and you have a well-rounded committee."

"We have all agreed to approach this responsibility with no agenda, simply and diligently trying to find the best person for the hour to fill this critical position for these challenging times. We covet the prayers of all Southern Baptists. On behalf of the entire committee, I want to thank the many of you who have already committed to pray for us in this process."

PRAYER

cont. from p. 1

"There's at least one thing we can all agree on today: America needs prayer," Floyd stressed. "The National Day of Prayer is biblically-based, Jesus-centered, and Holy Spirit-empowered."

H.B. Charles, current president of the Southern Baptist Convention Pastors' Conference and pastor of Shiloh Metropolitan Church in Jacksonville, Fla., will be a main speaker at the national observance, Floyd told Baptist Press (BP).

Floyd will interview Frank Pomeroy, pastor of First Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, whose congregation is recovering from the mass murder of 26 worshipers during a November 2017 Sunday morning worship service attack by a lone gunman in the small Texas community.

Going Beyond Ministries founder Priscilla Shirer, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference president Samuel Rodriguez, and other evangelical leaders will participate in the program.

Floyd said the National Day of Prayer "has thousands upon thousands of gatherings across the nation on May 3," many of which are listed at nationaldayofprayer.org. "While this has a national focus, it also has a global impact," Floyd said.

The prayer gatherings will be held in churches, schools,

★ PRAY FOR AMERICA ★

UNITY

EPHESIANS 4:1
MAKING EVERY EFFORT TO KEEP THE UNITY
OF THE SPIRIT THROUGH THE BOND OF PEACE

MAY 3, 2018

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NATIONALDAYOFPRAAYER.ORG

businesses, government offices, and outdoor venues, many led by Southern Baptist pastors or laypeople.

In 2017, an estimated two million Americans observed the events in over 30,000 venues across all 50 states, Floyd said.

Prayer gatherings are autonomous, but national leaders encourage a 25-25-40-10 breakdown, with 25% of the prayer time focused on local and state concerns, 40% on national concerns, and 10% on a national prayer led by Floyd and available

in text and video at nationaldayofprayer.org/national-prayer.

"While each gathering and observance is different, we are praying all will be forwarding our theme for unity," Floyd told BP. Unity in the nation, communities, churches, families, workplaces, and among all ethnicities is among prayer concerns recommended on the event's website, as well as prayers for the U.S. military and government, news media, businesses, the educational system, are also recommended.

Free resources, promotional items, and event planning aids are available at nationaldayofprayer.org, including a digital toolbox with prayer guides and videos.

An expanded catalog of purchasable promotional items including prayer journals, tote bags, and T-shirts is available on the site.

The 2018 National Day of Prayer can be viewed live on Daystar, at nationaldayofprayer.org, or on the event's Facebook page.

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3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the
grave to forgive my sins and to restore
my relationship with you.
(I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life.

From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship
with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church
for spiritual guidance.

Submission Guidelines

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published.

Preferred method: news may be submitted electronically to the e-mail address below, and must be included in the message segment of an e-mail form. Secondary method: news may be typewritten or neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and mailed. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone. Due to ever-present virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments in JPEG format are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

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There is no guarantee that news items and/or photographs will be published, and unsolicited material will not be acknowledged or returned. All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date. Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive.

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David Rainey and his family live in New Albany, Mississippi. David's life was eternally changed through The Baptist Children's Village, and consequently so has his family been changed for generations. David came to know the Lord the summer after his ninth-grade year while living at The BCV. He says of that experience, "I can honestly say, from that point on my life has not always been easy, but my life has definitely gone in a different direction."

David came to The Baptist Children's Village from a home filled with chaos and abuse. He is a Godly husband and father today but; the home he has built with his wife and three children sits in stark contrast to the life he knew growing up where there was constant shouting, and even gun fights between his mother and father. David was surrounded by anger from a very young age and grew to be a bitter, angry teenager. He had no dreams or expectations of even graduating high school. Through loving Houseparents and staff David did graduate high school. He ponders,

Because of you, David and Martha's children all know the Lord and have many opportunities. The Lord has opened doors for them through sports and in the community to be a light for Him.

As Satan wages war against families, we celebrate the victories God has had in David and Martha's family and pray that He continues to heal and restore hurting families in Mississippi through the ministry of The Baptist Children's Village.

The Rainey's are another example of how you are changing generations through The Baptist Children's Village. David's life will never be the same, and neither will the lives of Eathen, Rachel, or Joseph.

Enjoying God's Comfort • 2 Corinthians 1:3-14

Author Randy Kilgore recalls a terrifying experience while waking up after a serious heart surgery. An allergic reaction brought on violent shaking, and he had to be restrained. A nurse reached down and gently grasped her patient's hand, bringing him calm and comfort.

From time to time, we all need comforting. The stresses and distresses of life come from many angles. Perhaps a great loss, a lingering physical malady, persecution for our beliefs, a difficult work situation, or just day-to-day stressors that keep piling up leave us drained and desperate, physically and emotionally.

Comfort is the theme of this section of 2 Corinthians. The apostle Paul had faced many situations where "the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort" (vs. 3 NIV) met his needs. Thankfully, the phrase "any trouble" in verse four is all-encompassing. No struggle we face is beyond these parameters.

Some have said that "God will not give us more than we can handle", basing this premise on 1 Corinthians 10:13. However, that verse refers to temptation, not to trials. In verse 8 of today's Scripture passage, Paul mentions intense ordeals in Asia that produced "great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure". Why did God allow such? It was, Paul states, so that "we might not rely on ourselves, but on God, who

raises the dead" (vs. 9; see also 2 Corinthians 4:7-11).

Another purpose our Lord accomplishes through painful struggles is found in verse 4. In "The 365 Day Devotional Commentary", Lawrence Richards explains: "If you've ever anguished over the pain in your life, and cried out, 'Why?' here is one possible answer. The pain has equipped you to minister to others who suffer now as you have. Without experiencing their pain there is nothing you could say that would be heard. It is only because you hurt that you can help others heal."

Paul also says that whether his team was "distressed" or if they were "comforted" (vs. 6), it would benefit the Corinthians. This church could look to their spiritual forbears as role models, which would produce "patient endurance of the same sufferings". As Christ-followers today, we can embrace the testing of our faith, confident that God will strengthen us and demonstrate his power. James offers this perspective: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever



Explore the Bible with Ann Maniscalco

you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance" (James 1:2-3).

Looking back on their missionary travels, Paul could recall experiencing the Lord's mighty hand of deliverance time and again, and could confidently say, "on him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us" (vs. 10). But he reminded his fellow-believers in Corinth that they would be a part of this accomplishment by their prayers (vs. 11).

Answers to these supplications would result in thanksgiving on the part of many who would be recipients of this blessing (vs. 11). In 1 Corinthians 3:5-9, Paul talks of the team effort of growing God's kingdom, referring to those involved being "God's fellow workers". Oh, how often we underestimate the power and necessity of heartfelt intercession! Missionaries know and testify that faithful prayer warriors help soften and penetrate the hard soil of unbelief on the mission field.

In verses 12-14, Paul reminds the Corinthians of his godly influence on

their lives. He challenges them to better understand and value the role he has played, just as he valued them. Encouraging our leaders and fellow-workers in the faith is a way to support them and possibly bring them comfort during challenging times in their ministry.

When facing troubling times, a story from Mark 4:35-41 can help us. In this brief story, Jesus was snoozing in the boat's stern when a watery maelstrom engulfed them, causing the frantic disciples to fear for their lives. Notice, Jesus had instructed them to "go over to the other side" (vs. 35), knowing full well the storm they would encounter. We can see important truths in these verses: the Lord sometimes brings us into a storm, he is right there with us, and he uses such situations to reveal his power, protection and peace.

If you are in need of comfort today, consider these Old Testament Scriptures: 1 Samuel 17:34-37, 30:3-6 and Psalms 3, 13, and 31. David, in times of challenge and distress, found victory through a three-step approach: He candidly expressed his fears, he recalled God's faithfulness, and then he confidently praised his all-sufficient Lord. We can do likewise.

Maniscalco is a member of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Ocean Springs.

Stand With Conviction • Esther 2:21 – 3:6

The constant barrage of news via social media and 24-hour news outlets can often dull us and make us passive observers. Others can feel overwhelmed by all the wrong in the world and think there's nothing they can do. We can't fix every injustice we see, but we are called to step in where we can. Christians have no excuse for not doing the right thing when the opportunity is right in front of them.

Esther 2:21 – 23 – Stand against wrong.

We see Mordecai once more at his place at the king's gate. Mordecai, who held a position as a judge, was able to see those who passed through the gate. Because of Esther's role as queen, it's possible that she was able to secure this job for him. At any rate, Mordecai either heard or was made aware of an assassination plot against King Ahasuerus. Two palace eunuchs, Bigtan and Teresh, were planning the deed. We don't know if this was in response to an outsider like Esther being made queen or something else. Since time immemorial, palaces have been places of intrigue, with individuals or groups scheming to overthrow the current rulers.

So Mordecai hears of the plot and promptly tells Queen Esther, who pass-

es the word on to King Ahasuerus. Note that Esther gives credit to Mordecai for learning of the planned assassination, which meant that he would be officially cited for his diligence.

There was no trial, other than the report being investigated and verified. V. 23 states that the two men were hanged on the gallows, but some scholars believe that what actually happened was that they were impaled on a stake or post (NIV margin note on 5:14). This was how men were typically executed in the Persian empire.

Note that Mordecai got no commendation or reward for saving the king's life, although his name was written in the historical record. God was at work, however, as evidenced by Mordecai's willingness to stand against wrong. He was being obedient with no thought of recognition.

Esther 3:1 – 6 – Stand for God in the face of those who oppose Him.
Fast forward four years. Enter Ha-

man. Haman was an Agagite, which could mean that he was from a part of the empire known as Agag, or that he might be descended from Agag, king of the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:8). Haman was like Hitler or any other despot determined to wipe out the Jews – if he were indeed descended from Agag, the Amalekites were sworn enemies of God, for God wanted the Amalekites to be wiped from the earth. So you can imagine how

Haman would view the Jews in general and Mordecai in particular, after Mordecai's ethnicity was revealed.

Haman is promoted to the highest position in the kingdom, while Mordecai was left in his previous state of authority. Haman, who was vain and waned all the public acclaim he could gather, wanted the people to bow to him in homage. The king made this happen for him. This was not an act of worship – it was just a recognition of Haman's political stature.

Tellingly, Mordecai refused to bow. Mordecai shows himself to be a differ-

ent man than the one we encountered early on. If Mordecai had bowed to Haman, this would not be a violation of the second commandment; this would not have been a problem for the Jews. Bowing down to one in authority would be the same as showing respect to our leaders.

This put Haman in orbit. His response was that he wanted all the Jews killed, not just Mordecai. This is one of the first evidences of anti-Semitism we see in history. Mark Twain said that anti-Semitism is "the swollen envy of pygmy minds," and this is evidence. Haman is so petty – he has everything in the kingdom he wants yet he focuses on the perceived slight from Mordecai. This was also the first time Mordecai admitted he was a Jew. He is now taking a stand for God.

The implications are huge. If the Jews were executed throughout the kingdom, God's plan for the ages would be thwarted. We see Mordecai, as one lone individual, standing against the tide. He stood firm in the face of deadly opposition. We would do well to model the same courageous stand he took.

Martin is Associate Editor of The Baptist Record.

Bible Studies for Life with Tony Martin



LifeWay Research sorts through charity support

NASHVILLE (BP) — When it comes to charity, a personal touch works 10 times better than Facebook — at least for churchgoers, according to a study released April 17 by LifeWay Research, the evangelical research arm of LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville that specializes in surveys about faith in culture and matters that affect churches.

LifeWay Research's report indicates more than half of Protestant churchgoers say a personal connection inspired them to give money to a charity for the first time. The survey was conducted on Aug. 22–30 of last year.

Social media such as Facebook inspired only four percent of similar donations, the study found. Three-quarters of churchgoers support at least one charity besides their church. According to the survey, nearly half do volunteer work, while a similar number have made changes to the charities they support.

Churchgoers like to give and to get involved, said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research.

The question is, where will churchgoers give this year? The answer lies in having a personal connection, McConnell said. "It turns out charity really does start close to home."

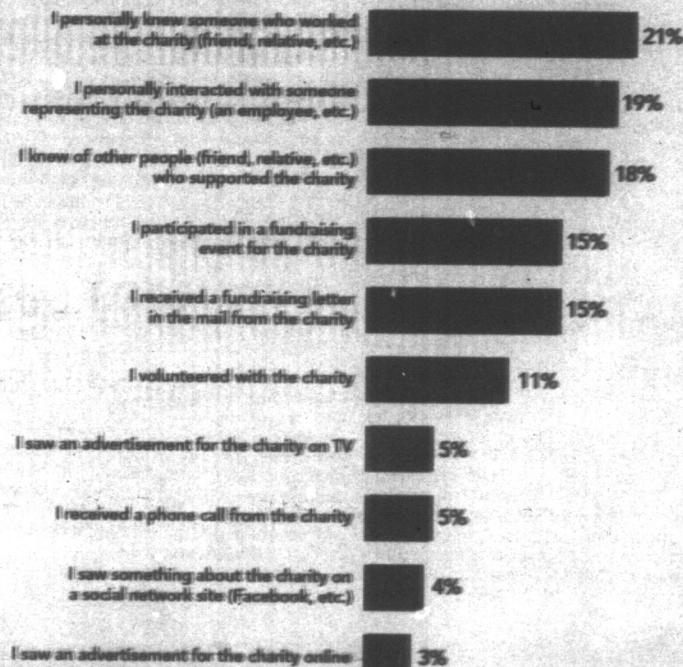
The nationally representative study asked adults who attend a Protestant church at least once a month to look at their charitable giving from 2016.

Sixty percent of those churchgoers gave to the same number of charities in 2016 as they did the previous year. Fifteen percent gave to more charities. Eight percent gave to fewer, while 15% were not sure.

Among those who donated to charities, 49% made changes in which charities they supported in 2016. Thirty-one percent gave to a charity they'd never supported before.

Top 10 reasons people decide to financially support a charity for the first time

Among American churchgoers supporting at least one charity



Note: Respondents could select all that applied. 21% were unsure.



LifeWayResearch.com

"The reality is that funding for charities is anything but stable," McConnell said. "When a donor adds a charity, it can take away from ministries they have supported in the past."

When asked what factor most prompted them to give, 21% say

they knew someone who worked there. Nineteen percent had met someone from the charity, while 18% say friends of theirs supported the charity.

Fifteen percent had been to a fundraiser, while 15% had received a letter from the charity.

Eleven percent had volunteered for the charity.

Less influential were telephone calls (five percent), television ads (five percent), social network sites such as Facebook (four percent), online ads (three percent) and email appeals (two percent).

LifeWay Research also asked churchgoers how many charities they gave to last year, aside from their local congregation. Those charities could be religious or non-religious. The donations could not be property or volunteer time.

Seventy-three percent of churchgoers gave to at least one charity beyond their church. This includes 15% who gave to one additional charity and 58% who gave to multiple charities. Thirty-four percent gave to two or three additional charities. Nineteen percent gave to between four and seven charities. About six percent gave to eight or more additional charities. Twenty-seven percent gave to no additional charities.

Churchgoers from Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal backgrounds are most likely to give only to their church (38%). Nondenominational Christians (30%) and Baptists (29%) were more likely to give only to their church than Lutherans (14%).

Lutherans (29%) are more likely to give to five or more charities than Baptists (13%), nondenominational (12%), or Assemblies of God/Pentecostal churchgoers (10%).

About half (48%) of churchgoers say they volunteer at a charity, including at their church. Forty-four percent don't volunteer. Eight percent aren't sure.

Those who go to church at least once a week (51%) are more likely to say they volunteer than those who attend once or twice a month (30%). More than half of Methodist (63%), Lutheran (55%), and nondenominational churchgoers (53%) volunteer. Baptists (38%) are less likely.

"Donors come and go frequently," McConnell said. "It helps to know why they give in the first place — typically a personal connection to the ministry or charity."

For more information on this study, visit LifeWayResearch.com.

Two more states remove Planned Parenthood funding

NASHVILLE (BP) — The states of Nebraska and Tennessee this month joined more than a dozen other states that have cut funding for abortion providers like Planned Parenthood, as part of a pro-life campaign that has seen mixed results.

Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts, a Republican, approved a budget that prohibits Title X funding from going to abortion providers and directs \$1.9 million toward centers that neither refer nor perform abortions.

Planned Parenthood criticized the move, predictably saying it would "block health care" for at least 8,000 people. However, Nebraska Right to Life director Julie Schmit-Albin pointed out the law will prevent "illegal melding of Title X funds to support abortion activities."

Use of federal funds to perform abortions or to fund entities that perform abortions is prohibited by federal law, but Planned Parenthood claims it uses its \$60 million in Title X funding and \$390 million in Medicaid reimbursements for other services.

In part because of that claim, many states' efforts to direct Medicaid or Title X funding away from the abortion giant are tied up in court battles.

Undeterred by those challenges, Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam, a Republican, signed two pieces of legislation that defund Planned Parenthood in different ways.

The first bill codifies an administrative policy from 2011 that prioritizes federally qualified health centers over other facilities, including abortion providers.

Brian Harris, director of Tennessee Right to Life, said the state has 187 federally qualified health centers and only four Planned Parenthood facilities. The health centers "are far more accessible and offer comprehensive services," he said.

Tennessee's policy has directed \$1.1 million away from Planned Parenthood every year, without directly targeting the abortion giant.

The policy doesn't directly name Planned Parenthood and, legally, they can still compete for the funds, Harris noted, "but they are a bottom tier contender and during the last seven years, no Title X funds have been directed by the state of Tennessee to Planned Parenthood facilities anywhere in our state."

The second law could face a

tough legal challenge, as it blocks state funds from going to abortion providers. Similar measures in other states have had mixed success. Of the 16 states that have either legislatively or judicially redirected some or all funding from Planned Parenthood to other entities, at least a half-dozen had federal judges block the laws.

The clash over funding has gone all the way to Washington, D.C. At the end of 2016, the Obama administration issued an order prohibiting states from withholding Title X funds from abortion providers, an 11th-hour rule that U.S. President Donald Trump overturned a month later.

Americans United for Life Chief Legal Officer Steven Aden said he expects the Supreme Court to examine the funding conflicts sometime next year. Kan-

sas has appealed a federal court ruling against its redirection of Medicaid funds from Planned Parenthood.

Louisiana plans to file its own petition later this month, Aden said.

Federally qualified health centers outnumber Planned Parenthood facilities 20-to-1 nationwide, and they offer a full range of healthcare, not just reproductive-related services, Aden noted. That makes redirecting funds beneficial not only from a moral perspective, "but it's also good fiscal policy and it's good healthcare policy," he said.

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